

Frome Town Council

Chapter 16

Community Engagement Strategy

5 Palmer Street
Frome
BA11 1DS

01373 465757

info@frometowncouncil.gov.uk

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1 Objectives

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Encourage effective local community engagement.
- Ensure that embedded throughout the Council there is a clear understanding of the need to engage with communities about decisions which affect them.
- Enable the aspirations/comments/suggestions etc. obtained from community engagement to have an impact on decision making and the way in which services are being delivered.
- Identify the principles behind how the Council can enhance its profile by improving engagement with the wider community (with specific reference to hard to reach groups).

2 The Council's Commitment to Community Engagement

Frome Town Council recognises the need to consider the impact of its actions on others and the surrounding environment. As a result the Strategic Plan is founded in the belief that the actions will help to protect and wherever possible enhance environmental quality and of equal importance, the decisions will be made ethically with regards to social and economic impact, which together the Council believes will help to make Frome a better place.

Frome Town Council is committed in its vision, aspirations and objectives to provide a democratic representational voice for the people of Frome, central to this ethos is engagement with the local community in a proactive and meaningful way,

3 Corporate Aims

Community engagement is embodied in the delivery of the Council's Strategy.

5 Principles

The Localism Act places considerable onus on increased involvement and therefore initial guiding principles are required, as noted below:

Involvement Principles

1. The Town Council cannot force any individual or group to become involved but it can, and will, make it easier and more attractive to do so.
2. It will always be clear, before the start of any participation or consultation event, to what extent the result will inform a decision.
3. If the outcome of a participation or consultation event is intended to inform a decision and a different decision is taken, the reasoning behind that decision will be clear and published.
4. All involvement will be time-bound and the aggregated results will be published openly.
5. Not every decision requires community involvement.

Engagement Principles

6. The Council will be clear at the start of the event what output is expected e.g. a recommendation, strategy suggestion etc.
7. Consultation events are not intended as an opportunity for individuals with a particular interest to lobby decision makers. While individuals may well have links with groups that have a vested interest, they should not represent those groups in informing the process. The process should encourage people to take the wider view, and to ensure that those not able to be at an event have their views expressed by others.

Consultation Principles

8. Consultations will be targeted at the relevant group or groups.
9. Events will be time-bound.
10. If an event calls for wider public involvement the event will be advertised locally allowing people time to organise their engagement with the event.
11. Specific, non-leading questions will be asked. Questions can be open (e.g. where do you think swings should be sited?) but not open-ended (e.g. what do you think should be done?).
12. Care will be taken to ensure that no one voice is given greater weight than any other.

6 Frome Town Council and Community Engagement

The Council currently facilitates community engagement in the following ways:

- Allocation of Public Participation at the beginning of each Council meeting. This provides an opportunity for local residents to make representations to the Council or ask questions relating to items on the agenda.
- Engagement is also encouraged throughout Council meetings
- The publishing of agendas, minutes and supporting documents for all Council meetings on the website, in the office window and on various notice boards around the town.
- Active involvement in the Annual Town Meeting with its public question time.
- The annual External Audit provides the opportunity for questions to be asked about the latest Statement of Accounts and Balance Sheet. A synopsis of the financial accounts is published within the Annual Report.
- The ability to provide Town Council information, when requested, to those with a need for alternative formats or languages.
- Making available the Councillor's contact details on the website and on various notice boards around town.
- News and events are also publicised through the websites, Facebook, Twitter and the Mayor's Facebook and Twitter pages.
- The Annual Report and Statement of Accounts made available as printed copies and on the website.
- Consultation exercises, surveys and questionnaires are undertaken with residents, young people and local user groups and organisations for specific projects and tasks.
- Inviting members of the public to Open Forums, Working Groups and Panels.
- Regular press releases featured in local media keep the general public informed of community events, projects and other Town Council items of interest.
- The Council has an Information Service that is open 6 days a week. The Council offices near the town centre are also open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.
- Where and when appropriate, external resource maybe utilised for a large and time consuming consultation or engagement exercise.

Unlike other tiers of local government, Town Councillors always live within 3 miles of the town they serve and therefore have close ties to their constituents and local voluntary and community organisations on a day-to-day basis, making them uniquely placed in terms of informed representation.

7 Future Improvements

Frome Town Council is committed to improving community engagement by enforcing the aforementioned principles and:

- Continuing all the above activities and services into the future; improving relationships with community groups; developing measures to harness the views and opinions of people and groups who are often missed out of community engagement activities.
- Identifying and embracing opportunities to work with other local community groups, as and when the need arises.
- Extending and developing the range of electronic communication including a presence on social networking media such as Facebook, Twitter etc.

- Participating in local networks to share knowledge and experience of community engagement activities in other areas.
- Publicising the positive results that have been achieved from working relationships between the Council and other community groups; in order to encourage new relationships to be formed and raise community spirit.
- Ensuring that appropriate evaluation is carried out following consultation exercises to ensure that lessons learned are carried forward and an assessment of how effective and useful the consultation was.

8 Linking with other Council Policies

How will this link to other policies?

This strategy is cross-cutting affecting many, if not all, of the Council's policies and strategies. Including:

- Equality and diversity is integral to good governance, leadership and appreciation of the diversity in our community.
- A Community Engagement Strategy is a requirement for the accreditation of Quality Council Status.